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# STUDIES IN INTELLIGENCE



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*Recent Books*

BURMA DROP. By *John Beamish*. (London: Elek Books and Toronto: Ryerson. 1958. Pp. 222. 16/-.)

This autobiographical account of espionage and guerrilla activity in the Japanese-held Burma jungles is unfolded by its

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<sup>1</sup> All citations in this paragraph are retranslations out of Joesten's German rendering.

Anglo-Burmese author in a cultured British prose sometimes incongruous with the dashing, adventure-happy flavor which it has in common with other tales of OSS exploits around the world. As a matter of fact Beamish, presumably out of respect for his secrecy oath, delicately avoids implicating the OSS in the Burmese operations he details. He gives his employer as British Force 136, describes his fellow-agents as though they were all British, and acknowledges the existence of American operations only in picturing his chance encounter with a colorful lone Texan whose extravagant personal equipment was suggestive of the White Knight's mad miscellany.

This reticence with respect to his true employer prevents him from telling the reader that his first mission, to which he devotes about half his book, was one of the two or three early successes which convinced General Stilwell and local Army headquarters that OSS Detachment 101 deserved full support and a fair share of the scarce means and materiel available in the theater. The ten-man party with which Lt. Beamish made his first parachute drop, in February 1943, blew up bridges in the Myitkyina area along the Japanese supply route from Mandalay and then spent several months investigating conditions in northern Burma and sending back intelligence reports by radio before making its way to Fort Hertz via the Triangle.

Beamish, the records indicate, did leave Detachment 101 after this mission, in mid-1943, and the other two missions he describes were presumably carried out under the auspices of Force 136, whose operations were more or less coordinated with those of the OSS. At any rate these two later assignments of the author coincide in character with the two emergent phases of Detachment 101's developing activity — during most of 1944 a concentration on the gathering of intelligence by espionage teams, and in 1945 the organization and direction of guerrilla warfare with irregular forces, largely Kachin, which came to number as many as 10,000. Beamish' second mission was devoted to determining the vulnerability of the ferries along the Salween boundary between Japanese- and Chinese-held territory and to assessing the strength of local defense forces and possibilities for guerrilla recruitment. The active guerrilla warfare phase of operations began for him in January 1945 when he was parachuted down to a guerrilla center being organized near Lashio. Highlights of this mission were the res-

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cue of a Shan chief, along with some sixty members of his household, from Japanese internment, and the routing of Japanese regulars attacking an airstrip.

*Burma Drop* illustrates authentically the tradecraft of jungle operations; but the reader will probably remember it best for the author's love of his green Burmese forests, his warm affection for the Kachins, his nostalgia for the timber camp and its elephants who courageously "lifted" the refugees of 1941 into Assam, and his melancholy acquiescence to the passing of a gracious colonial era.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Another member of Detachment 101 is the author of a new novel about the OSS in Burma—Dean Brellis' *The Mission* (New York: Random. 1958. \$3.50). Brellis' story is fictitious and contains little tradecraft, but in terms of human experience and appreciation of the Kachins his book is a more moving one than *Burma Drop*.